Scenery Management System Process

Refer to: Landscape Aesthetics: A handbook for Scenery Management. USDA Forest Service Agriculture Handbook 701

An **Ecological Unit Description** (EUD), sometimes called a mapping unit description, represents the common starting point for SMS and for Ecosystem Planning. An objective description of the biological and physical elements is drawn from the EUD and combined with identified landscape character attributes to develop the **Landscape Character Description**. It is a combination of the scenic attributes that make each landscape identifiable or unique. Landscape Character creates a "Sense of Place," and describes the image of an area. The Landscape Character Description provides the frame of reference for defining the Scenic Attractiveness classes.

Scenic Attractiveness (ISA) classes are developed to determine the relative scenic value of lands within a particular Landscape Character. The three ISA classes are: Class A, Distinctive; Class B, Typical; Class C, Indistinctive. The landscape elements of landform, vegetation, rocks, cultural features, and water features are described in terms of their line, form, color, texture, and composition for each of these classes. The classes and their breakdown are generally displayed in a chart format. A map delineating the ISA classes is prepared.

The Landscape Character description is used as a reference for the Existing Scenic Integrity of all lands. Scenic Integrity indicates the degree of intactness and wholeness of the Landscape Character; conversely, Scenic Integrity is a measure of the degree of visible disruption of the Landscape Character. A landscape with very minimal visual disruption is considered to have high Scenic Integrity. Those landscapes having increasingly discordant relationships among scenic attributes are viewed as having diminished Scenic Integrity. Scenic Integrity is expressed and mapped in terms of Very High, High, Moderate, Low, Very Low, and Unacceptably Low.

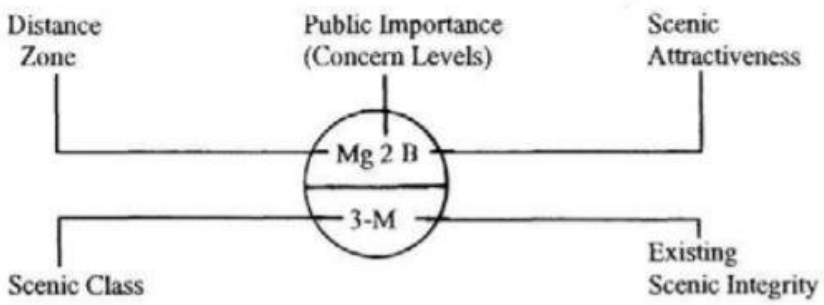
Landscape Visibility is composed of two parts: human values as they relate to the relative importance to the public of various scenes and the relative sensitivity of scenes based on distance from an observer. Human values that affect perceptions of landscapes are derived from constituent analysis. This information may be derived from many sources including, but not limited to: independent research; other facets of ecosystem assessments; local, regional, and national studies.

Constituent Analysis serves as a guide to perceptions of attractiveness, helps identify special places, and helps to define the meaning people give to the subject landscape. Constituent analysis leads to a determination of the relative importance of aesthetics to the public; this importance is expressed as a Concern Level. Sites, travelways, special places, and other areas are assigned a Concern Level value of 1, 2, or 3 to reflect the relative High, Medium, or Low importance of aesthetics.

Seen Areas and Distance Zones are mapped from these 1, 2, or 3 areas to determine the relative sensitivity of scenes based on their distance from an observer; these zones are identified as Foreground (up to 1/2 mile from the viewer), Middleground (up to 4 miles from the foreground), and Background (4 miles from the viewer to the horizon).

Using the data gathered and mapped for Scenic Attractiveness and Landscape Visibility, a numerical **Scenic Class** rating is assigned to all lands. These ratings, 1 -7, indicate the relative scenic importance, or value, of discrete landscape areas. Mapped Scenic Classes are used during forest planning to compare the value of scenery with other resources, such as timber, wildlife, old-growth, or minerals.

At this point in the planning process, a Landscape Value map is prepared using overlays of all the data gathered. The Landscape Value is expressed as an icon, a sample of which is shown below:



This icon represents the inventory of scenic attributes and their related social values. The map provides information to planning teams concerning the relative scenic values of a subject area and the extent to which those values are intact.

During the alternative development portion of the planning process, the potential and historical aspects of the Landscape Character Description are used to develop achievable Landscape Character Options in concert with other resource and social demands. Landscape Character Descriptions and associated Scenic Integrity levels, long- and short-term, are identified for each option and alternative. Upon adoption of a plan, the Landscape Character Description becomes a goal and the Scenic Integrity levels become Scenic Integrity Objectives. Subsequent plan implementation will include monitoring of both long- and short-term goals and objectives for scenery management.

Scenery Management is not static. It is as dynamic as the world in which we live. This handbook is provided in a loose leaf format to facilitate the refinement of this system in time and the incorporation of future knowledge and research findings.